



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Doctrinal Catechesis Session
Mary Birmingham

SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING OF THE SICK



Healing of the Ten Lepers by James Tissot, 1886-1894



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

OPENING PRAYER

- ▶ Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.
- ▶ Option 2: Use the prayer below.

Anointing Within Mass: Opening Prayer B

God of compassion,
You take every family under your care
And know our physical and spiritual needs.
Transform our weakness by the strength of your grace
And confirm us in your covenant
So that we may grow in faith and love.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, for ever and ever. Amen. (Used by permission)

✓ Note to the Catechist

There is more material than you can use in a one hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best suited for your particular group. A handout begins on page 14.



Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the **Breaking Open the Word** worksheet for this week.

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Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT
Rev. Steven Olds
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR
† Most Rev. John Noonan
Bishop of Orlando

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Sharing Human Experience

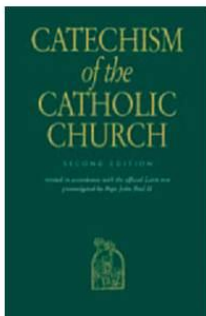
Catechist invites participants to engage in the following exercise. They will need paper and pens.

- ▶ Consider your lives. Take a panoramic view. Look back at all the times you experienced illness or that a loved one or close friend experienced illness. What impact did those illnesses have on you, your family, or your life?
- ▶ What were the positive consequences (if any)?
- ▶ What were the negative consequences (if any)?
- ▶ In looking back on those experiences can you now see in retrospect the hand of God in those events? How might God have been operative in the lives of those who were affected by those illnesses?



Keeping time

Catechist invites participants to share insights gleaned with one other person for a brief period and then surface insights in the wider group. About ten minutes.



Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 1499-1525.

Anointing of the Sick is one of the two sacraments of healing: anointing of the sick and penance/reconciliation.

The theology

- ▶ Illness is a part of life. At some point every person will experience it in some form or another. Very often illness teaches us profound lessons about life.
- ▶ One Good Friday a woman shared her story of illness with the parish community. She said that the day she was diagnosed with incurable lung cancer is the day she

was born again. It was the day she learned what it meant to be fully alive. She told the community that she had been an unconscious participant in her life. Her illness brought her into constant contact with the God who resides within. It taught her to live and love to the fullest. It taught her to celebrate each day and recognize the gift that it is. While praying and hoping for a miracle, she nonetheless thanked God for the gift she found within her fatal disease.

- ▶ The challenges of our lives can either make us bitter or they can make us better. The young woman just mentioned found that her illness was the catalyst that taught her how to live and what is important in life. No matter the outcome she was grateful for the joy it brought to her life.
- ▶ The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us: “Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him” (CCC 1501).
- ▶ The latter was certainly the case in the experience of the woman with cancer. Her experience obviously made her better. Not everyone experiences illness in the same way. For some it is an unbelievable burden, one that brings a person to the brink of despair. For others like the woman, it brought hope and new life into her world.
- ▶ Jesus understood the horror of illness. In his day sick people were often cast out of the community. People who were not considered *whole* were considered *unclean*. Not only did they have to suffer the illness, but they also had to endure the indignity of rejection and expulsion from the community.
- ▶ We are told in sacred Scripture that Jesus was filled with compassion for sick people. The word *compassion* means sorrow and the deepest emotion down to one’s very entrails—to the absolute core. Jesus experienced the pain of others illness to the very core of his being. He could do no less than heal them and restore them to life in the community.
- ▶ That same compassion continues today in the ministry of the Church—through the sacramental life of the Church—through the sacraments of anointing of the sick, reconciliation as well as Eucharist. Today we are focusing our attention explicitly on the sacrament of anointing of the sick.
- ▶ Jesus’ healing was a sign that the kingdom of God had arrived. Jesus had the power not just to heal but to forgive sins as well.
- ▶ Jesus’ depth of compassion for the sick was so intense that we are taught that he took our infirmities upon himself. He bore them and took them with him to the cross.
- ▶ Jesus did not heal everyone. The healings he did perform had a larger significance and purpose. They were signs of the arrival of the kingdom of God and the announcement of Christ’s victory over sin and death (CCC 1504).
- ▶ **IMPORTANT:** Sickness, while intimately connected with the human condition, is not punishment for personal, individual sins. (John 3 and Pastoral Care of the Sick PCS, #2)

- ▶ Our illness is an opportunity for us to embrace the Paschal Mystery and join our suffering to the cross of Christ thereby becoming active participants in his ongoing redemption of the world. There is no greater meaning in life.
- ▶ We are expected to fight against all forms of illness and do what we can to foster good health.
- ▶ The sick people in our midst are an icon for us—a reminder of that to which we are all called—eternal life with God. The witness of the sick person is a reminder that life is transitory and that we are mortal beings. Mortal as we are, we are thus compelled to abandon our lives to God's purpose. We are called to constant, redeeming conversion.
- ▶ Doctors and caregivers are also called to be tenacious in their fight against illness and their physical, spiritual and holistic care for the sick person.



Sharing Faith

The Catechist invites group discussion.

- ▶ What have you heard thus far?
- ▶ What does our Church teach us about illness?
- ▶ What blessings and opportunity can be found in the midst of illness?
- ▶ Why was the healing Jesus performed considered significant?
- ▶ Why are sick people an icon for us? What does that mean to you?
- ▶ Do you know anyone whose illness made him or her better and not bitter?

The Sacrament

- ▶ The Church directs us that sacraments are opportunities for conversion.
- ▶ Sacraments are opportunities to deepen our faith in Christ.
- ▶ This is indeed true when it comes to the anointing of the sick.
- ▶ Those who are sick are in dire need of the God's grace and strength lest they plunge into despair and lose heart and faith.
- ▶ Thus, through the sign of touch and anointing with oil Christ strengthens the sick person.
- ▶ The priests of the Church lay hands on the sick person. They offer a prayer of faith, and they anoint the sick person with holy oil—oil that has been blessed by God.
- ▶ This prayer of faith and laying on of hands and anointing manifests, makes present and signifies the grace and strength that the sacrament gives. Indeed the prayer, imposition of hands, and anointing with oil confers it (cf PCS, #5).



Sharing Faith

Catechist: If the sacramental signs (prayer/hands/oil) confer what they signify, it is worthwhile for us to briefly reflect on what they mean and why they are used in this sacrament.

Laying on of hands

- ▶ Think of a moment in your life when you found deep meaning in another person's touch.
- ▶ What did that signify for you?
- ▶ In what way does that experience speak to you about God and about why this sign is associated with this sacrament?
- ▶ Consider your life. Can you name a time in your life in which you were aware of God's healing touch?

Participants share in dyads and then share insights in the wider group.

Oil

Optional exercise:

Catechist provides lotion and invites participants to close their eyes and rub the lotion on their hands and arms. Catechist invites participants to respond to the following question regardless of whether or not engaged in the optional exercise.

- ▶ What are the properties of oil?
- ▶ How is oil used in the world?
- ▶ In what way might oil remind us of God's action in our life?
- ▶ What is there about oil that makes it an effective sign for this sacrament?

Catechist uses their responses to launch into a discussion about the symbols of hands and oil.

Theological significance of Laying on of Hands

- ▶ The laying on of hands is a sign of God's healing, sacramental touch.
- ▶ In the Bible hands are laid upon a person to signify a changed reality.
- ▶ The imposition of hands sets things apart for a sacred purpose.
- ▶ It is used as a gesture of blessing.
- ▶ Hands outstretched over an assembly, blesses the entire group (Lev. 9:22).
- ▶ In the New Testament, the hand was associated with power.
- ▶ Hands were imposed to heal people. Jesus was asked to heal Jairus' daughter by laying his hands on her.
- ▶ The laying on of hands was also a sign of mission. The apostles laid hands on the seven and they were assigned a special service (Acts 6:6).
- ▶ The laying on of hands was also associated with the installation of some office, either the presbyterate or apostle (2 Tim. 1:6).
- ▶ The Holy Spirit was conferred at baptism through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17-19; 19:6).

- ▶ In the liturgy the laying on of hands is a sign of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Every liturgical action exercises the epicletic action of calling down the Spirit of God to bless, sanctify, transform, and effect the desired grace.
- ▶ Hands are extended to invoke the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ Hands are extended as an invocation requesting that the Holy Spirit effect a change. For example, in Eucharist hands are extended over the bread and wine and the changed reality is the Body and Blood of Christ. In the sacrament of anointing of the sick, hands are laid, and the sick person is restored to spiritual and/or physical healing and/or wholeness.

Theological significance of oil

- ▶ Anointing with oil is a sign of a changed reality. The sick person is healed.
- ▶ Oil is medicinal; it is a healing agent; it does not easily rub off but lingers to continue its healing power and properties.
- ▶ This sacrament confers the healing of Christ the Physician; oil is used in anointing to signify and effect (make happen) a changed reality (from illness to health, from disintegration to integration, from despair to hope and joy).
- ▶ Oil is used in the Bible as a healing agent. “So they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them” (Mk 6:12-13). Oil is easier to rub in than rub off.
- ▶ Oil has healing and medicinal qualities. It is an essential element of life. See appendix #2.
 - It is used in cooking, for energy, lubrication and protection from the elements.
 - Oil is a precious world commodity; wars are fought over its control.
 - The greed associated with misuse of oil can destroy God’s creation. One need look no farther than the Gulf of Mexico to know the truth of that statement!
 - All those aspects found in the natural world can be used to express the reality of the Spirit.
- ▶ Our natural experience of oil reminds us of the Spirit.
 - The Spirit stays with us.
 - The Spirit heals and is a soothing, calming presence.
 - The Spirit is balm for our wounded soul, and strength in times of need.
 - The Spirit is the unifier that holds God’s people together.
 - The Spirit is our life force.
- ▶ Oil expresses the ineffable reality of the Spirit.
- ▶ The Spirit strengthens us when we must lay down our lives for the sake of this precious new commodity: life in Christ.
- ▶ Oil is a necessary for life.
- ▶ The human body must have oil to survive.

Historical context

- ▶ Read James 5:13-16 out loud together.
- ▶ Community leaders ever since the time of the ancient Church and right down to the present have laid hands on and anointed sick people.
- ▶ As the ritual practice evolved over the centuries it was used more exclusively with those who were at the point of death than it was for sick people. It was always a sacrament for the sick,¹ but it eventually was only celebrated at the moment of death. As a result it was given the name *Extreme Unction*.
- ▶ Many older Catholics are more familiar with *Extreme Unction* than they are with Anointing of the Sick since the latter was restored as part of the renewal of the Second Vatican Council. The proper use of the sacrament as spiritual and physical medicine for the sick was restored and given prominence only since 1974.

Sacrament for the dying: Viaticum

- ▶ The sacrament for the dying (*viaticum*: Holy Communion-food for the journey) was more clearly set forth as the proper sacrament for those at the point of death.
- ▶ The Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ's Passover from death to resurrected life. It should always be the very last sacrament the faithful receives. It is the sacrament that completes the earthly journey, signifying the "passing over" to eternal life (CCC, 1517).
- ▶ Just as there are three sacraments that begin a person's Christian life—baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, so two are there are three sacraments that bring it to a close—penance, anointing of the sick and viaticum.
- ▶ However, if death is immanent, and time is of the essence, the sacrament of penance is celebrated first if possible, then viaticum since it is incumbent on all Christians to receive Eucharist in preparation for their final journey home. Anointing of the sick can be omitted.
- ▶ A deceased person is not anointed. Sacraments are for the living. The priest should pray for the deceased person asking that God forgive their sins and welcome them into heaven (PCS, 15).
- ▶ However, if there is doubt as to whether the person is dead, the priest should confer the sacrament.

¹ In spite of the evolution of this sacrament as a sacrament for the dying, "the liturgy has never failed to beg the Lord that the sick person may recover his health if it would be conducive to his salvation." (Council of Trent (1551): DS 1696)

Who can receive this sacrament?

- ▶ Anyone who is seriously ill and in danger of death.
- ▶ Anyone who had already celebrated the sacrament due to serious illness then recovered and became seriously ill again.
- ▶ If that same person's condition were to worsen further, he or she is permitted to receive the sacrament again.
- ▶ Anyone about to undergo a serious operation.
- ▶ Elderly who are frail.

Who ministers the sacrament?

- ▶ Priests and bishops are the only ministers of this sacrament.

How is this sacrament celebrated?

- ▶ This is a liturgical action and a communal action.
- ▶ Since it is a communal celebration a primary place for celebration is the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy where the Paschal Mystery of Christ, his suffering, death and resurrection, are manifested to the assembly.
- ▶ It can take place in the home, an institution, a hospital, or church.
- ▶ The sick person is anointed on the forehead and on the hands.
- ▶ As the sick person is anointed on the forehead the priest prays the following prayer:
 - ▶ “Through this holy anointing, may the anointing in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.”
- ▶ As the sick person is anointed on the hands the priest completes the prayer:
 - ▶ “May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up.”
- ▶ Adaptations can be made. The entire prayer can be prayed all at once or a different part of the body may be anointed if necessary due to the condition of the sick person.

Effects of the sacrament.

- ▶ The sick person is strengthened by the Holy Spirit to overcome their pain and difficulties. They are given peace and courage.
- ▶ The sick person participates in the Paschal Mystery of Christ and joins his or her suffering to Christ and thus participates in the ongoing redemption of the world. The sick person finds new meaning in suffering.
- ▶ The sick person is prepared for the final journey home to heaven.

Christian Witness

Catechist may invite a parishioner who has experienced the sacrament to witness to the grace of the sacrament.

Catechist shares an experience from his or her life in relation to this sacrament—the witness should focus on how the sacrament effects (makes happen) what it signifies. See Appendix #1 for an example.



Community Connections

- Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenge us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world. The Spirit empowers us to go out and transform the world.

Catechist invites a minister of the sick to come and witness to their ministry. Perhaps participants might accompany a Eucharistic minister as they bring Communion to the sick at the hospital. Perhaps participants could go as a group to minister to people in a nursing home.



Mystagogy & your decision for change

Time permitting Catechist invites an open dialogue:

- What did you learn about this sacrament today? What did you hear?

Catechist invites participants to respond in faith to one or more of the following challenges.

- In what way does today's session invite you to more fully enter into Christ's death and resurrection?
- What are the implications of this sacrament for your life?
- What one thing are you willing to do this week in response to what we have shared today? Change a belief, a behavior, an action, and an addiction?

Journal

Select a question from above on which you would like to make notes and keep a journal throughout the coming week.



Closing Prayer

Gather the group into a circle.

Leader: Let us pray.

The psalmist understands human suffering and reflects with us when he says:

Pray together:

O Most High, when I am afraid,
in you I place my trust.
God, I praise your promise;
in you I trust, I do not fear.
My wanderings you have noted;
are my tears not stored in your bottle,
recorded in your book?
My foes turn back when I call on you.
This I know: God is on my side.
God, I praise your promise;
in you I trust, I do not fear. (NAB Ps 56, 3b, 4, 5a,9-12a)

Leader: The God who loves us so much that he stores our tears in his bottle and records it in his book is the same God who wants to heal us, who offers us his healing strength and compassionate love.

Let us pray.
Lord Jesus Christ,
You chose to share our human nature,
To redeem all people and to heal the sick.
Look with compassion on those who are sick who we now name...
(Call out the names of those who are ill at this time).
Support them with your power,
Comfort them with your protection.
And give them the strength to fight against evil.
Since you have given them a share in your own passion,
help them find hope in suffering
for you are Lord for ever and ever. (adapted from PCS, Prayer after
Anointing, C, 147)

If anyone in the group is ill, all could gather around this person, the catechist could lay hands on them, and the rest of the community could extend their hands in prayer.

Leader: Let us offer one another a sign of Christ's peace. Let us go in the peace of Christ.

Appendix

#1. I recall a powerful experience of hands being laid upon me that in looking back effected a powerful change in my life. Members of my choir suggested that we celebrate a sacrament of anointing of the sick for my very mentally ill child. Since he would not be able to participate, I sat in proxy for him. The pastor joined our gathered small community and anointed me as he prayed for the healing of my child. He laid hands on me in the sacrament of anointing of the sick, but my choir friends also laid hands upon me.

I remember the power of that experience. I knew something had changed but I was not sure what it was. As days turned into weeks I realized that I was the one who was healed. I had a new strength to turn my child over to God's care. I experienced a greater peace and abandonment to God's will in my life. As a result of releasing my child to God's care, and not trying to control the situation, my child was also released and started to improve. The Spirit truly effects change when we call on him in faith through our sacramental signs.

#2. The movie, *Lorenzo's Oil*, poignantly shows us how oil is essential for life. A young boy is diagnosed with a debilitating disease. After being told that their son will die from this disease, the movie segues to a scene from an Easter Vigil celebration. The Easter candle is processed through the church. One can almost hear the debate, anger and rage going on in the heart of the mother. Her resolve is written over her countenance. The Easter Vigil scene subliminally suggests that this couple's quest is initiated by God's own Spirit, the Giver of Life. The parents leave the church with holy determination. They would begin their new life. Nothing would ever again be the same for this family. They would begin their life of research, struggle, rebuff, and rejection, the paschal life.

The couple's unceasing and untiring efforts ultimately led them to the demon agent of this disease. Lorenzo and others so afflicted were missing a derivative of an oil found in every kitchen, basic olive oil. Lorenzo's parents discovered this missing agent and helped scientists develop a treatment for the disease. Love for their son extended beyond themselves to love for others. Their quest for this holy oil helped not only their son but others with the same disease.

Handout for Anointing of the Sick

The theology

- ▶ Illness is a part of life. At some point every person will experience it in some form or another. Very often illness teaches us profound lessons about life.
- ▶ One Good Friday a woman shared her story of illness with the parish community. She said that the day she was diagnosed with incurable lung cancer is the day she was born again. It was the day she learned what it meant to be fully alive. She told the community that she had been an unconscious participant in her life. Her illness brought her into constant contact with the God who resides within. It taught her to live and love to the fullest. It taught her to celebrate each day and recognize the gift that it is. While praying and hoping for a miracle, she nonetheless thanked God for the gift she found within her fatal disease.
- ▶ The challenges of our lives can either make us bitter or they can make us better. The young woman just mentioned found that her illness was the catalyst that taught her how to live and what is important in life. No matter the outcome she was grateful for the joy it brought to her life.
- ▶ The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches us: “Illness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him” (CCC 1501).
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Historical context

- ▶ Read James 5:13-16 out loud together.
- ▶ Community leaders ever since the time of the ancient Church and right down to the present have laid hands on and anointed sick people.
- ▶ As the ritual practice evolved over the centuries it was used more exclusively with those who were at the point of death than it was for sick people. It was always a sacrament for the sick,² but it eventually was only celebrated at the moment of death. As a result it was given the name *Extreme Unction*.
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- ▶ The Eucharist is the sacrament of Christ's Passover from death to resurrected life. It should always be the very last sacrament the faithful receives. It is the sacrament that completes the earthly journey, signifying the "passing over " to eternal life (CCC, 1517).
- ▶ Just as there are three sacraments that begin a person's Christian life—baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, so two are there are three sacraments that bring it to a close—penance, anointing of the sick and viaticum.
- ▶ However, if death is immanent, and time is of the essence, the sacrament of penance is celebrated first if possible, then viaticum since it is incumbent on all Christians to receive Eucharist in preparation for their final journey home. Anointing of the sick can be omitted.
- ▶ A deceased person is not anointed. Sacraments are for the living. The priest should pray for the deceased person asking that God forgive their sins and welcome them into heaven (PCS, 15).
- ▶ However, if there is doubt as to whether the person is dead, the priest should confer the sacrament.

² In spite of the evolution of this sacrament as a sacrament for the dying, "the liturgy has never failed to beg the Lord that the sick person may recover his health if it would be conducive to his salvation." (Council of Trent (1551): DS 1696)

Who can receive this sacrament?

- ▶ Anyone who is seriously ill and in danger of death.
- ▶ Anyone who had already celebrated the sacrament due to serious illness then recovered and became seriously ill again.
- ▶ If that same person's condition were to worsen further, he or she is permitted to receive the sacrament again.
- ▶ Anyone about to undergo a serious operation.
- ▶ Elderly who are frail.

Who ministers the sacrament?

- ▶ Priests and bishops are the only ministers of this sacrament.

How is this sacrament celebrated?

- ▶ This is a liturgical action and a communal action.
- ▶ Since it is a communal celebration a primary place for celebration is the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy where the Paschal Mystery of Christ, his suffering, death and resurrection, are manifested to the assembly.
- ▶ It can take place in the home, an institution, a hospital, or church.
- ▶ The sick person is anointed on the forehead and on the hands.
- ▶ As the sick person is anointed on the forehead the priest prays the following prayer:
 - ▶ "Through this holy anointing, may the anointing in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit."
- ▶ As the sick person is anointed on the hands the priest completes the prayer:
 - ▶ "May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up."
- ▶ Adaptations can be made. The entire prayer can be prayed all at once or a different part of the body may be anointed if necessary due to the condition of the sick person.

Effects of the sacrament.

- ▶ The sick person is strengthened by the Holy Spirit to overcome their pain and difficulties. They are given peace and courage.
- ▶ The sick person participates in the Paschal Mystery of Christ and joins his or her suffering to Christ and thus participates in the ongoing redemption of the world. The sick person finds new meaning in suffering.
- ▶ The sick person is prepared for the final journey home to heaven.